



Worth the Wait

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ENHANCER OF JOY

Awe/Wonder

DURATION

65 minutes

LESSON DEVELOPED BY

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GOAL

Waiting for God with Joy

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Prayerfully read Luke 1:26-56
- Reflect on times of joyful anticipation in your life

MATERIALS CHECKLIST

- 4 notecards per participant, 2 markers per participant
- Encourage participants to bring their smartphones
- Wifi access for "GIF off"
- *For fun: A gavel for judges in the "GIF off"*
- Candy for team prizes
- Paper and pens for each participant to take notes during individual reflection time
- Bibles for each participant

SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

Make sure there is comfortable seating for participants, and adequate space to both break into 2 groups for a team exercise and also give room for participants to sit quietly and reflect.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 1:39-56

Purpose

Participants will learn that joy and waiting go hand-in-hand when it comes to Christian faith. The joy we experience when we've waited for an incredible gift or moment-in-time is often marked by God's work in our lives. Through examining Mary's joyful response to the news of her pregnancy with Jesus, participants will reflect their own joyful encounters with Jesus- and those of their family, friends, and community.

Objectives

In this session participants will explore what joyful waiting looks and feels like in light of God's promise to show up (think: incarnation) in our lives. Young people will examine recent times of hope-filled and joy-filled waiting in their lives, and connect that practice with God's work in their lives. Participants will learn that the true basis of human friendship is the friendship we receive from God in Christ.

Further Study

Read: Though this article doesn't connect directly with the practice of waiting, it highlights that in youth ministry, we must be willing to connect the dots for young people to practices or discipleship that appear(s) "mundane." The idea of "waiting" is not flashy or exciting- it's simply hopeful. Written by a seasoned youth minister, Seth Vopat, this article may inspire some good reflection for your volunteer team:

<https://thethread.ptsem.edu/articles-1/all-our-young-people>

Introduction for Leaders

There are at least two kinds of waiting. There's the kind of waiting that leaves us feeling, well, bored. And then there's the kind of waiting (for Christmas, for Birthdays, for exciting vacations and events) that leaves us filled with hope, wonder, and eager anticipation. This kind of waiting- the wonder and joy-filled kind- has a lot to do with what it means to be a Christian. This is the kind of waiting that Jesus inspires. It's the kind of hope-filled waiting that the Psalmist talks about, "Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long" (Psalm 25:5). As Christians, we believe that the God we are waiting for is a God who keeps promises, and a God who shows up with good news every time.

Young people don't always associate things like wonder, awe, and joy-filled waiting with their faith lives. The most awe-inspiring events for young people revolve less around Easter Sunday, and more around who is performing during this year's half-time show at the Super Bowl. And those of us who lead young people struggle with our own understanding of waiting. The kind of waiting we might be most accustomed to are the moments in life where we're waiting in line, or waiting to hear back on test scores or results. Waiting is not often equated with joy.

But the church tells a joyful story about waiting. We have to look no farther than Mary's joyous outburst of song when she received the news that she was going to bear God's son into the world: What it would have been like to wait for Jesus to be born? We meet another joy-filled "waiter" in the person of Simeon, whose whole life had been spent coming to the

temple, waiting to see God’s salvation and light (Luke 2:22-38). When he held Jesus in his arms, he could not contain his joy.

The practice of waiting (or: advent), for Christians, is a joy-filled practice. Behind the waiting is an expectation that God is going to show up. Waiting, for the church, must always be filled with a sense that there is something beyond us- a God who breaks in to our lives- and fills our lives with joy. When we wait like Mary or like Simeon for God to show up in the world, we will not be able to contain our joy when God makes good on that promise. As the facilitator of this lesson, spend some time in reflection prior to leading the group: When have you had a clear sense of God “breaking-in” to your life? What was your reaction? Have you connected “waiting” and “joy” with your faith before? Can you think of someone in your life for whom “waiting” and “joy” go hand-in-hand?

As you explore the idea of “waiting” as joyful anticipation with young people, keep in mind that when God shows up, God brings things like: justice, new life, forgiveness, and mercy to our lives. These are the most satisfying kinds of gifts we can be given. You will spend time in this lesson guiding young people to reflect on practices of waiting and joy, with the goal of instilling a familiarity with wonder and awe for Christian faith- alongside the young people you serve.

Gather

Gather (10 minutes)

- Set-up: make sure you have notecards, markers, and tape. Use a wall or flat vertical surface and label two sections: “I couldn’t wait for…” and “But I did wait for…”
- Greet participants and invite them to be seated in your discussion area. As they enter, engage with them about their week. Once a critical mass has arrived, begin the activity.

Activity 1: “What Are You Waiting For”

- Invite participants to take four notecards and two markers (different colors).
- On two of the cards, instruct them to write two major life events (or vacations, holidays) for which they were especially excited. Tell them to name things “that you couldn’t wait to do or take part in.” Give your own examples to get them started.
- On two of the cards (in a different color), instruct them to write down how long they prepared for those events (OR: they could write the amount of time they were excited for/

eagerly anticipating these events). For example, “364 days” or “2 years” (...is how long I wait for my favorite day of the year: Christmas/my birthday/to get a bike/etc...).

- Have each participant share with the group, telling about the events that have most excited them. As they share, have them stick their events up with tape under “I couldn’t wait for...” and stick their time cards up under “But I did wait for...” Pick a participant who is good with numbers to add up all the waiting that’s been done by the group for these major events.
- After participants each get to share, and the group mathematician adds up all of the time spent waiting, ask the group to come up with a few adjectives to describe how this kind of waiting *felt* (e.g. exciting, scary, annoying, hopeful, etc...)

Engage

Engage (30 minutes)

Biblical Engagement: “Hurry Up and Wait” - Bible Study

- Set the scene by telling the story of the Angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she was going to have a son (you can re-tell Luke 1:26-38 in your own words). Then have one person read Luke 1:39-56 aloud to the group.
- Ask: After Mary visited Elizabeth, she sang a song of joy. What do you think it was that gave Mary such joy?
- Have participants highlight the moments of deepest joy in Mary’s song.
- Ask: How long did Mary have to wait for Jesus to be born?
- Ask: What kinds of things did Mary hope and claim that Jesus would bring with him/ do when he arrives?
- Ask: How was Mary’s waiting for Jesus to be born similar, or different, from the things we listed together for our own waiting?

Activity 2: GIF competition (Activity: 2 or more groups, 2 or more “judges”)

- Ask a participant to volunteer and explain to the group what a GIF is and how they are used (OR: you can appoint the kid who you know is most active on social media).
- Introduce the idea of a “GIF Off” to the group, with candy as your prizes. Divide into two teams, and have the teams each develop 2-3 GIFs that try to capture how Mary felt while waiting for Jesus to be born. They can use their smartphones and their Bibles as materials. Tell them that GIFs using relevant Biblical language will receive 5 points, GIFs

that inspire a laugh will receive 3 points, and GIFs worthy of an eye-roll will receive 1 point (if you're feeling generous).

- Encourage light-hearted humor.
- Pull aside an adult volunteer to help you as a judge.
- Give the teams 7-10 minutes to develop 2-3 GIFs as a team, using their smartphones, and the scripture passage they just read.
- Regather.
- Have both teams present their GIFs to the selected judges, and award points. *Idea: Make it extra fun by giving the judges a gavel to use!*
- The winning team receives their candy prizes, and the group can vote on one or two GIFs that they try to share among each other that week on social media.

Reflect

Reflect (20 minutes)

Activity 3: "Worth the Wait" (Group and Individual Reflection)

- Say something like: "Jesus was well worth the wait: for Mary, for the world! First, we'll talk about some reasons that Jesus was worth the wait. Then, we'll reflect on some things in our lives that were worth the wait."
- Name: As a group, have participants name some of the key gifts and teachings that Jesus brought into the world:
 - Example responses (*Teaching us to love our neighbor, being with the brokenhearted, healing and loving the sick and un-lovable, dying on the cross, the promise of new life through the resurrection, etc...*)
- Brainstorm: Tell them they will have 5-7 minutes to sit quietly and reflect on the things in their lives that were "worth the wait." Encourage them to stay away from material objects, but they are free use the things listed in your gathering activity that really connect with joyful "worth the wait" moments in their lives. After they've picked moments and experiences "worth waiting for" ask them to reflect on where they experienced God in their waiting. Lead by example, and share one or two things that were "worth the wait" in your life (e.g. getting into a select choir or landing your first job). Share the places and moments where you sensed God's presence or can see God's fingerprints now that you look back. Hand out paper and pens so that they can jot down notes.
- Regather after 5-7 minutes.
- Invite participants to share the places where they have seen God at work in their waiting.

Activity 4: “Community Waiting List” (Group Reflection)

- Say something like: “Mary is our model for what it looks like to wait with joy. Mary is not only joyful about the process of waiting for Jesus to be born, but she expects that it will, in fact, happen. Mary believes that God will keep God’s promise to her. We’ve reflected a lot on the times of waiting in our own lives, but let’s think now about the people we know and love- and what they’re waiting for. Who do you know that is waiting for something- eagerly, joyfully, waiting for something in their lives?” *[As participants respond, encourage them to think about others in the congregation who are waiting- including members of their own families.]*
- As participants share about the people in their lives who are joyfully waiting, make a list of those names and situations for the closing prayer.
 - *Tip: Widen the scope beyond just people their age- help them think about young moms in the congregation who are pregnant, young adults who are looking for jobs or heading off to different schools, and children who are waiting for milestones like losing teeth or learning to ride a bike. Of course moments like upcoming surgeries, etc... will come up, too.*

Send Forth

Send Forth (5 minutes)

- Sum-It-Up: “As Christians, we believe that God is in the business of showing up in our lives- each and every day- in expected and unexpected ways. In some ways, this means that we are always waiting: waiting for God to keep God’s promise to show up in our lives. When God does show up, one of the most holy responses we can have is a response of joy.”
- Closing Prayer — take out the list you made from Activity #4, and assign each participant a name of someone in your community to pray for. Pick a participant to open and a participant to close in prayer.